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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 KABUL 003765

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EMBASSY PRAGUE PLEASE PASS TO U/S EDELMAN
STATE FOR SCA/FO (DAS GASTRIGHT), SCA/A
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/CDHA/DG
NSC FOR JWOOD
OSD FOR MSHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CJTF-82 AND POLAD

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR UNDERSECRETARY EDELMAN'S NOVEMBER
7-8 VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN

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Classified By: AMB. Wood, for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION: Your visit, coming near the end of this year,s fighting season, is an opportunity to assess 2007,s military, political and development progress and to prepare the ground for major challenges in 2008. With 2008 being the last full year before the next Afghan presidential election, President Karzai,s government is focused on bringing increased security and prosperity to the people. We are getting a lot right, but significant challenges remain. On the positive side:

-- Although Taliban asymmetric attacks have increased, ISAF battlefield successes have bought time and space for political and economic progress;
-- Recent polling shows strong public support for Karzai (albeit at somewhat lower levels than in the past) and for a continued international presence;
-- Many more Afghan National Army (ANA) units are scheduled to come on line in coming months and we are about to embark on a major Afghan National Police (ANP) reform and retraining program linked closely to development assistance;
-- Although there is a long way to go, economic growth is up and the backbone of national infrastructure is building;
-- Coordination and cooperation among USG agencies in Afghanistan is working well and improving; we are moving toward a common campaign plan in-country; Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) remain a work in progress, but with the help of State,s S/CRS experts, we are methodically applying lessons learned for planning and training purposes;
-- The U.S. military in RC-E, working closely with civilian PRT counterparts and Afghan civilian and security authorities, is making effective counterinsurgency doctrine a reality in its AOR.

The list of challenges remains long, many of which are not entirely in U.S. or Afghan control; key issues include:

-- Despite ISAF and OEF battlefield successes, we will have to work closely with Karzai to ensure that his outreach efforts to woo significant Taliban elements away from violence and into the Afghan body politic do not cross USG

redlines; we also need to remain heavily engaged in shoring up Allied commitments to ISAF;

-- Taliban and al-Qaida sanctuary in Pakistan will remain an abiding problem, with the impact of Pakistan's internal political turmoil on Afghan security interests still to be assessed; and we need to keep an eye on growing Iranian meddling both in Afghanistan's domestic political arena and in support of the Taliban;

-- The continued growth in illegal narcotics production, which finances Taliban operations and undermines progress in governance, has to be tackled;

-- We need to keep Karzai focused on governance and corruption issues, e.g., by reinforcing the positive step of moving sub-national governance control from the Interior Ministry (MOI) to the Palace)- including supporting initiatives that help the government address the politically explosive gap between expectations and delivery of services

-- and his initial steps to reform the MOI.

¶2. (S) International community (including U.S.) kibitzing on governance issues and the hard work of managing the complex political geometry of ISAF coalition members create inevitable frictions with Karzai and the IROA. Your visit provides a critical opportunity to reassure senior Afghan officials of the depth of the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan.

END SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION.

SECURITY

¶3. (C) Under GEN McNeill, NATO-ISAF has worked closely with Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to maintain pressure on insurgents, beating them regularly on the battlefield and increasing the stability necessary for good governance and economic

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development. Polls show that the Afghan people solidly support the presence of international forces in Afghanistan. ISAF-OEF coordination, meanwhile, is excellent, while efforts to further protect civilians and counter Taliban disinformation have made real headway since the summer.

¶4. (S) The Taliban remain resilient, however, evidenced by their massing of forces and seizure of territory in Farah, Helmand and Kandahar. While overall attacks in 2007 are up from 2006, especially via asymmetric means (improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombings, and kidnappings), government tactics are also evolving, particularly in Kabul and major urban areas. The Taliban's use of dramatic violence is bitterly resented by the people, but also shakes their confidence in the ability of Karzai's government and ISAF forces to protect them. The increase in Taliban attacks in the west, north and in Kabul also raises the specter of former warlords and powerbrokers taking up arms to fend off insurgents, which should be strongly discouraged. We need to reassure President Karzai that ISAF will continue to work closely with expanded ANA units to aggressively pursue stability operations in 2008, so that the government has more time and space to improve local governance and development.

¶5. (S) The Allies remain a particular cause for concern. While the Canadians and Dutch are shouldering heavy burdens, the south is certain to become more unstable if they impose artificial timelines, reduce their involvement or depart. Secretary Gates, strong statement to this effect at the NATO

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Noordwijk Defense Ministerial was most welcome and we continue to press Allies stationed in the north and west to do more. European political wrangling has not, so far, harmed operations on the ground, but could if or Allies announce plans to depart or internal Alliance debate turns into public recriminations.

AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES

¶ 16. (S) ANSF are playing an increasing role in establishing and maintaining security. ANA units are acquitted themselves well in combat, particularly when matched with U.S. or Allied mentoring teams, and the Army is evolving into a respected national institution. While some Army units can operate independently, most play supportive roles in larger ISAF operations due to their limited capacity for planning, logistics, and integrated operations. The ANA pay system is becoming more transparent, having a positive effect on morale and retention. According to the Combined Security Transition Command (CSTC-A) Afghanistan, we have trained and equipped about 47,000 ANA, of which 31,000 are combat troops, with a cyclical present-for-duty rate at around 68 percent. Getting to the 70,000 goal, which is likely to increase to 80,000 in 2008, will take time. Minister Wardak needs to stay focused on implementing agreed ANA train and equip programs and avoid &shopping8 for advanced weapons systems that Afghanistan cannot afford or sustain.

¶ 17. (C) The ANP is at least two years behind the ANA in qualitative development, however, and widely viewed as corrupt and inept by the Afghan people. A CSTC-A survey covering 301 of 395 districts accounted for 80 percent of police in those districts, a positive sign. New equipment is arriving and being distributed but it will take time and serious efforts to get the police fully ready to handle frontline insurgent threats. Starting this December, CSTC-A's new Focused District Development (FDD) strategy will seek to retrain and reform entire ANP units, district by district. We should encourage Afghan leaders to wholeheartedly embrace this program so that FDD security advances can be closely linked to development assistance in each district.

¶ 18. (C) The USG and the international community are also promoting serious MOI reform measures to reduce corruption and ensure that the police force will meet community policing, counterinsurgency, and counter-narcotics goals.

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President Karzai's recent reshuffling of 28 Afghan National Police (ANP) officers partly reflects the need, publicly and systemically, to end corruption at all levels of government. Regrettably, this move was also a response to internal IRoA political pressures, with some senior figures known for their venality simply reshuffled to other, less prominent positions. Public perception that the government is seriously willing to tackle corruption is critical to enhancing Karzai's stature as he prepares for the 2009 elections. We need to encourage the IRoA at all levels, not just MOI, to take serious steps to investigate, charge and prosecute corrupt leaders in order to enhance the government's stability and credibility.

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

¶ 19. (C) Although President Karzai benefited politically from his successful Camp David visit and cross-border Jirga with Pakistan, both in August, he faces serious political challenges at home. Presidential elections are less than two years away, and opposition groups, including the Northern Alliance (recycled as the United Front Party), are encouraging the population to focus on what the government is not delivering. With the licit economy improving (albeit from a low starting point), polls show that the people's number one concern has shifted from employment to security, and Karzai has only a short window to demonstrate that the government is meeting people's needs. We strongly supported his moving responsibility for local governance out of the MOI into a new Independent Directorate for Local Governance in

the Palace and are working with the new Director to support initiatives focused at strengthening provincial and particularly district governance.

COUNTERNARCOTICS

¶10. (C) Poppy cultivation and opium trafficking grew at an alarming rate in 2007, feeding the insurgency and undercutting development and good governance efforts. The narcotics economy now accounts for about one third of Afghan GDP. On August 27, UNODC announced that 193,000 hectares were cultivated with poppy in 2007, up from 165,000 in 2006, and 74,000 hectares in 2002. Karzai's response to the announcement was in keeping with his characteristic hesitancy to take on the opium problem: he cast barely-veiled blame on the international community and called for &Afghan solutions.⁸ The Ministry of Counter Narcotics and many provincial governors waged an anti-poppy campaign during this fall's pre-planting season. Result: northern and central provinces seem to be continuing their drift away from poppy cultivation; Nangarhar, the second biggest poppy producer last year after Helmand, is showing strong success in curbing planting; however, the big poppy producing areas of the south, including Helmand province, seem bent on another year of heavy cultivation. In August we released the new U.S. counter narcotics strategy for Afghanistan, outlining intensified efforts through all five pillars (eradication, alternative livelihoods, public information, law enforcement, demand reduction). The U.S strategy and the UNODC report emphasize the need for extensive forced eradication; and in October the Policy Action Group (PAG) set the goal of eradicating 50,000 hectares in 2008. Karzai remains opposed to aerial spraying but has given signs he may permit limited ground-based spraying. We should encourage Karzai to meet the PAG's eradication goal and take the steps necessary to make spray available as a counter narcotics tool. We should also encourage Karzai to hold governors accountable for curbing the opium economy in their provinces.

TALKING TO THE TALIBAN

¶11. (S) On September 29, President Karzai stated that he was

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willing to talk with the Taliban and insurgent leaders, including Mullah Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The Taliban failed to take the bait, however, saying that they would not talk unless all Western soldiers were removed from Afghan soil. Our message to Karzai has been clear and consistent since 2004. We do not oppose talks so long as certain redlines are respected: the U.S. will continue counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations; no talks with senior Taliban leaders on our blacklist without prior consultations; no power sharing; no protected geographic areas; and individuals or groups must lay down their arms, recognize the constitution and democratically-elected government, and have no association with Al Qaeda.

DEALING WITH THE NEIGHBORS

¶12. (C) Presidents Karzai and Musharraf have ceased their public bickering since the surprisingly successful August 9-12 cross-border Peace Jirga. In private, Karzai still blames Pakistan for radicalizing Pashtuns on both sides of the border and fueling the insurgency. The 50-person bilateral &jirgagai,⁸ which is to guide implementation initiatives that came out of the August Peace Jirga, is scheduled to meet by mid-November. Given Pakistan's political turmoil, this may be delayed. We are encouraging both governments to maintain the momentum.

¶13. (S) From the west, Iranian assistance to the Taliban contrasts sharply with Tehran's professed support for President Karzai. ISAF and OEF have intercepted several weapons shipments, including Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFPs), of unambiguously Iranian origin. We have engaged Karzai on several occasions about Iranian meddling. In private, he shares our worries, but resists public condemnation of Iran's duplicity. The Afghans plead that they cannot risk a two-front war, and Karzai's attention remains fixed on Pakistan as the more serious external threat to Afghanistan's peace and stability. His Deputy National Security Advisor has told us the Palace is more concerned by the Iranian government's acknowledged support for the Northern Alliance than "radical elements" who are supplying arms. We continue to stress that ignoring Iran's malicious actions) which has led to the deaths of international forces and Afghan alike) will not improve Tehran's behavior.

RECONSTRUCTION AND THE ECONOMY

¶14. (SBU) The IMF projects that licit GDP growth for 2007 will be 13 percent and that this level of growth will need to be sustained to absorb Afghanistan's unemployed (estimated at 40 percent) and the 2.4-plus million refugees still living in neighboring countries, while generating greater revenue to cover government expenditures. We remain focused on improving the national infrastructure, particularly roads and electric power. We need to stress that IRoA fiscal responsibility is not only essential for maintaining macroeconomic stability but also for managing long-term security programs, especially the anticipated increases in ANA and ANP personnel ranks.

¶15. (SBU) With eighty percent of Afghanistan's workforce in the agricultural sector, our USAID and other USG programs seek to transform Afghanistan's rural economy from its current anemic traditional base, susceptible to purchasers of illegal drugs, to a modern, integrated, commercial agricultural economy growing licit high value crops and exporting to high-priced demand centers. The Afghan First program has shown the way forward with its contracting for bottled water, uniforms, and construction services. In the future, we hope the Afghan government will be able to work more proactively with USG -- including DOD -- health experts to help Afghan food suppliers elevate their quality so that more meat, poultry, fruits, and vegetables can be produced

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locally and sold to Coalition forces.
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